RODENTZ

By

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BOOK TWO: THE HYBRID WAR

Prologue — The Bat in the Dark

The city had gone quiet.

Not peaceful.

Quiet.

There was a difference.

From the roof of an abandoned factory, Megan Waller watched the lights of Hawthorne Academy flicker in the distance.

The school had once been a place where ordinary teenagers learned algebra, history, and biology.

Now it was a fortress.

A refuge for hybrids.

A place where kids with feathers, scales, fur, claws, tails, wings, and other impossible mutations could hide from the outside world.

Max Hawthorne called it a sanctuary.

Megan called it a cage.

Behind her stood dozens of hybrids.

Some were barely older than the students inside Hawthorne Academy.

Others had been changed months earlier and had spent that time running from frightened adults, police, soldiers, and anyone else who believed the hybrids were dangerous.

A fox-eared boy tightened the straps on his backpack.

A girl with antlers stared toward the school.

A massive bear hybrid stood silently near the edge of the roof.

Megan turned toward them.

“We spent months hiding,” she said.

Nobody spoke.

“We hid in basements. Abandoned buildings. Tunnels. Forests. Anywhere humans couldn’t find us.”

Her wings unfolded slightly.

“While Max Hawthorne built himself a kingdom.”

A few hybrids murmured.

Megan pointed toward the distant school.

“They tell you Max is protecting you.”

She smiled bitterly.

“He’s protecting his idea of what hybrids should be.”

The others listened.

“We didn’t ask for this.”

Megan’s voice hardened.

“But we’re here now.”

She looked toward the academy.

“So let’s stop running.”

Chapter One — The Academy

Suna woke to the sound of screaming.

She sat upright.

For a moment she didn’t know where she was.

Then she remembered.

Hawthorne Academy.

The dormitory.

The Change.

Her quills brushed against the pillow.

Suna climbed out of bed and hurried into the hallway.

Students were already running toward the windows.

“What happened?”

“Look outside!”

Suna pushed through the crowd.

Beyond the academy’s fence, something moved between the trees.

Then another.

And another.

Hundreds of silhouettes.

Max appeared at the end of the hallway.

His expression changed when he looked outside.

“Everyone stay inside.”

A student laughed nervously.

“Why?”

Max didn’t answer.

Because they could all see them now.

Hybrids.

An army.

And at the center stood Megan.

She raised one hand.

The army stopped.

Then she looked directly toward the academy.

Even from this distance, Suna could see the anger in her eyes.

Max stepped toward the window.

“Megan.”

Suna swallowed.

“She’s here.”

Max nodded.

“She’s finally decided to stop asking.”

A loud metallic crash echoed across the campus.

The outer gate shook.

Students screamed.

Max turned around.

“Everyone to the shelter.”

“But what about you?”

“I’m staying.”

Suna stared at him.

“You can’t fight all of them.”

Max looked at the frightened students surrounding him.

“No.”

He glanced back toward Megan’s army.

“But maybe we don’t have to.”

Chapter Two — Megan’s Army

Megan had spent months building something Max never believed she could.

An army.

Not soldiers.

Not monsters.

Hybrids.

Every one of them had a reason to hate the world.

Some had been chased from their homes.

Some had lost family members.

Some had been experimented on.

Others simply wanted revenge.

Megan had given them somewhere to belong.

She had given them a purpose.

But there was something she hadn’t told them.

She didn’t intend to stop with Hawthorne Academy.

The academy was only the beginning.

Her real target was the government facility where the first hybrid research had begun.

And she believed the students at Hawthorne were standing between her and that goal.

Especially Max.

Chapter Three — Suna

Suna didn’t trust Megan.

But she didn’t completely trust Max either.

That was the problem.

Max wanted the hybrids protected.

Megan wanted them free.

And Suna couldn’t decide which one was right.

She remembered what the world had been like before the Change.

Teachers.

Parents.

School buses.

Normal mornings.

She wondered if any of that could ever return.

Then she looked at her hands.

Tiny quills covered her fingers.

Normal was gone.

Maybe Megan was right.

Maybe fighting was inevitable.

But Suna didn’t want to become someone who believed violence was the only answer.

That was when she realized something.

If Megan and Max went to war, the hybrids would lose.

No matter who won.

Chapter Four — The First Breach

The academy’s eastern fence collapsed just after midnight.

Megan’s army poured through.

Alarms screamed.

Students scattered through the corridors.

Max and several older hybrids rushed toward the breach.

Suna followed.

“Stay behind me!” Max shouted.

“I can help!”

“You’re not a fighter!”

Suna stopped.

That sentence hurt more than she expected.

Not because Max meant to insult her.

Because she knew he believed it.

A shadow passed overhead.

Megan landed on the roof.

She looked down at Max.

“Still protecting them?”

Max stared upward.

“Still pretending you’re saving them?”

Megan’s expression hardened.

“You’ve got children hiding behind you.”

“So do you.”

“They’re not children.”

Megan spread her wings.

“They’re survivors.”

The two stared at each other.

Then Megan jumped.

Chapter Five — The Truth About the Elders

During the chaos, Suna discovers a sealed laboratory beneath the academy.

Inside she finds records belonging to the Elders.

The files reveal something terrifying.

The Change wasn’t random.

The Elders knew it was coming.

They had known for years.

And Max had never been told the entire truth.

Suna finds one final document.

A projection activates.

A scientist appears.

“If you’re seeing this, the Change has already begun.”

Suna watches.

“The mutations are accelerating.”

The recording glitches.

“There will be a second stage.”

Suna freezes.

A diagram appears.

Nine genetic patterns.

Nine original mutations.

And beneath them:

THE FIRST NINE.

Suna recognizes her own designation.

Her heart pounds.

She isn’t just one of thousands.

She is one of the originals.

Part Two — WAR

Megan’s attack forces Hawthorne Academy into lockdown.

Max organizes the students into defensive groups.

Megan establishes her headquarters in an abandoned industrial district.

Neither side realizes that someone else is manipulating the conflict.

The Elders begin disappearing.

Hybrid communication networks are sabotaged.

And mysterious creatures begin appearing around both camps.

Suna becomes convinced that the war between Megan and Max is distracting everyone from something much bigger.

Meanwhile, Megan discovers that one of her closest commanders has secretly been working for the Elders.

Her army begins to fracture.

Part Three — THE FIRST NINE

Suna finally confronts Max about the secret files.

“You knew.”

Max shakes his head.

“I didn’t.”

“Then who did?”

Neither has an answer.

Megan arrives.

For the first time, Suna, Max, and Megan stand together.

The three enemies discover that the Elders have been studying the First Nine because those nine hybrids may possess abilities capable of changing every other hybrid.

Suna is one of them.

Megan is another.

And Max is a third.

The war suddenly has a new meaning.

Whoever controls the First Nine could control the future of the hybrids.

Part Four — THE FALL OF HAWTHORNE

The academy is attacked again.

This time, Megan isn’t responsible.

A mysterious force overwhelms both armies.

Students and rebels are forced to fight side by side.

Max saves Megan.

Megan saves Max.

Neither acknowledges it afterward.

Suna discovers that the attackers aren’t trying to kill the hybrids.

They’re trying to capture them.

One by one.

The academy falls.

The students are forced into the surrounding wilderness.

Hawthorne Academy burns behind them.

Max looks at the ruins.

“We lost.”

Megan shakes her head.

“No.”

She looks toward Suna.

“We just lost our hiding place.”

Final Chapter — The New World

Weeks later, the remaining hybrids gather deep underground.

There is no academy anymore.

No sanctuary.

No army.

No safe place.

But something has changed.

Megan no longer commands an army.

Max no longer runs a school.

Instead, they are building something neither believed possible.

A community.

Together.

Suna stands before hundreds of hybrids.

She looks at Max.

Then Megan.

Then everyone else.

“We spent so long asking whether we were human.”

She looks down at her quills.

“Maybe that’s the wrong question.”

Silence.

“Maybe we’re supposed to become something new.”

A distant rumble shakes the underground chamber.

Everyone looks upward.

Suna’s expression changes.

The rumble becomes louder.

Then the lights go out.

A voice echoes through the darkness.

“The First Nine have awakened.”

Suna looks toward Megan.

Megan looks toward Max.

Max whispers:

“Run.”

Something enormous roars above

Chapter Twelve — The Voice Underground

The chamber remained completely dark.

Nobody moved.

Nobody spoke.

Then the voice came again.

“RUN.”

This time, the command seemed to come from everywhere.

Suna grabbed Max’s arm.

“What is that?”

“I don’t know.”

Megan looked toward the ceiling.

“You heard it too?”

Max nodded.

A deep vibration passed through the floor.

Dust fell from the ceiling.

Then a section of the wall cracked open.

Beyond it was a narrow tunnel.

Suna stared into the darkness.

“That wasn’t there before.”

Megan stepped forward.

“Yes, it was.”

Max looked at her.

“How would you know?”

“Because I’ve been here before.”

Suna’s stomach tightened.

“When?”

Megan looked away.

“Before I started the rebellion.”

She stepped into the tunnel.

“The Elders built this place underneath the academy.”

Max followed.

Suna came behind them.

The tunnel stretched farther than any of them expected.

Eventually, they reached a massive steel door.

A symbol had been carved into it.

Nine circles.

Suna recognized it immediately.

“The First Nine.”

Megan touched the door.

“It isn’t a symbol.”

“What is it?”

“A warning.”

The door opened.

Chapter Thirteen — The Laboratory

The room beyond was enormous.

Rows of abandoned machines covered the walls.

Glass chambers stood empty.

Cables hung from the ceiling.

At the center of the room was a circular platform.

Nine symbols surrounded it.

Suna recognized three.

Her own.

Megan’s.

Max’s.

But six others were unfamiliar.

“What happened here?” Max whispered.

Megan walked toward a computer terminal.

She pressed a button.

The screen flickered.

A recording appeared.

A scientist stood in front of the camera.

“My name is Dr. Elias Vale.”

Suna listened.

“The Change was never intended to happen all at once.”

Max stared at the screen.

“What does that mean?”

The recording continued.

“The transformation was designed to occur gradually across generations.”

Megan’s eyes widened.

“Designed?”

The scientist nodded in the recording.

“The First Nine were created to carry the genetic markers necessary to stabilize the hybrid population.”

Suna felt cold.

“So we’re experiments.”

“No,” Max said.

The recording answered him.

“You are not experiments.”

The scientist paused.

“You are the next stage.”

The screen went black.

For several seconds, nobody spoke.

Then Megan whispered:

“Next stage of what?”

A second screen activated.

Nine words appeared.

HUMANITY WAS NEVER THE END.

Chapter Fourteen — The Sixth Signal

Across the country, something awakened.

A young hybrid boy sat alone in an abandoned train station.

He had feathers along his arms and bright golden eyes.

For weeks he had heard the same sound in his dreams.

A heartbeat.

Tonight, the heartbeat stopped.

He opened his eyes.

A voice whispered inside his head.

“Sixth.”

He stood.

The lights around him flickered.

Every electronic device in the station turned on at once.

A map appeared on every screen.

One location blinked.

Hawthorne Academy.

The boy stared at it.

Then he heard another voice.

“Come home.”

He didn’t know who was speaking.

But he knew exactly where to go.

Chapter Fifteen — Enemy Territory

Megan’s former army was scattered.

Some hybrids had followed her into hiding.

Others blamed her for the destruction of Hawthorne.

Max wanted to find them.

Megan didn’t.

“They won’t forgive me.”

“Maybe they don’t have to.”

Megan looked at him.

“You don’t understand.”

“I understand more than you think.”

She shook her head.

“You’ve always had people.”

Max was silent.

Megan continued.

“I was alone when the Change happened.”

For the first time, Max saw something beneath Megan’s anger.

Fear.

Suna interrupted them.

“We don’t have time to argue.”

Both looked at her.

She pointed toward the laboratory.

“If those recordings are real, there are six other First Nine.”

Max nodded.

“We find them.”

Megan frowned.

“And then what?”

Suna answered.

“We figure out why the Elders were afraid of us.”

Chapter Sixteen — The Possum’s Secret

Max finally told Suna something he’d never told anyone.

His father had been one of the Elders.

Suna stared at him.

“You knew?”

“I knew my father was involved with the research.”

“You never told us.”

“I was afraid.”

Megan laughed bitterly.

“That’s your problem.”

Max looked at her.

“What?”

“You keep calling secrecy protection.”

Max’s expression hardened.

“And you keep calling anger freedom.”

Suna stepped between them.

“Enough.”

Both became quiet.

Suna looked at Max.

“Where is your father?”

Max hesitated.

“Dead.”

“Are you sure?”

Max didn’t answer.

That was answer enough.

Chapter Seventeen — The Man in the Mask

Three nights later, they found him.

A man stood in the ruins of an old church.

Tall.

Gray-haired.

Wearing a black coat.

And a white mask.

Max stopped walking.

“Father.”

The man slowly turned.

Megan raised her fists.

Suna felt her quills rise.

The man removed the mask.

He looked older than Max remembered.

But alive.

Max’s voice trembled.

“You were supposed to be dead.”

“I needed everyone to believe that.”

“Why?”

His father looked toward Suna.

“Because the First Nine were never supposed to discover the truth.”

Suna stepped forward.

“What truth?”

He smiled sadly.

“The Change is spreading.”

Megan stared at him.

“Everyone knows that.”

“No.”

He looked toward the horizon.

“You don’t understand.”

His expression became serious.

“The Change isn’t spreading through humans.”

He looked directly at Suna.

“It’s spreading through everything.”

Chapter Eighteen — The Animals

The forest became silent.

Too silent.

Birds stopped singing.

Insects disappeared.

Then the animals came.

Not ordinary animals.

Their bodies had begun changing.

A deer with strange crystalline antlers stood between the trees.

A fox with feathered limbs watched from the brush.

Even the birds carried unfamiliar patterns.

Suna whispered:

“The Change.”

Max nodded.

“It’s not just humans.”

Megan looked frightened.

“Then what happens when it reaches everything?”

Max’s father answered.

“We don’t know.”

Suna looked at the mutated animals.

“Someone does.”

The man nodded.

“The Elders.”

“Where are they?”

He pointed toward the mountains.

“They built their final facility there.”

Megan smiled.

“Then that’s where we’re going.”

Chapter Nineteen — The Mountain

The journey took four days.

They traveled mostly at night.

Along the way they encountered other hybrids.

Some joined them.

Others refused.

Nobody trusted Megan.

Nobody completely trusted Max.

But Suna slowly became the person everyone listened to.

Not because she was the strongest.

Because she kept asking questions.

At the foot of the mountain they discovered an enormous metal door built into the rock.

Megan touched it.

A symbol appeared.

Nine circles.

The door opened.

A voice spoke.

“Welcome home.”

Suna looked at Max.

“That’s creepy.”

Max nodded.

“Very.”

They entered.

Behind them, the door slammed shut.

Chapter Twenty — The Ninth Door

The facility was still operating.

Machines hummed.

Lights flickered.

Screens displayed thousands of genetic sequences.

Suna walked through the main laboratory.

Then she stopped.

Nine doors stood before them.

Eight were closed.

One was open.

Her symbol was above it.

Suna stared.

“Why is mine open?”

Max’s father looked terrified.

“Because you’re the first.”

“The first what?”

“The first one to awaken.”

Megan stepped toward another door.

Her symbol appeared.

It opened.

Inside was an empty chamber.

Then Max’s door opened too.

The three stared at one another.

A voice came from the speakers.

“Three have arrived.”

Suna looked around.

“Where are the others?”

The answer came immediately.

“Coming.”

Suddenly the entire facility shook.

Something struck the outer wall.

Then again.

And again.

Max’s father looked toward the entrance.

“They found us.”

Megan prepared herself.

“Who?”

He answered with one word.

“The Collectors.”

Chapter Twenty-One — The Collectors

The doors exploded open.

A group of armored figures entered the facility.

They weren’t human.

They weren’t fully hybrid either.

Their bodies were covered with artificial armor fused directly to their skin.

Their faces were hidden behind smooth masks.

Megan stepped forward.

“Who are you?”

The leader removed his helmet.

Beneath it was the face of a young hybrid.

A foxlike face.

Scarred.

Cold.

He looked directly at Suna.

“We are what happens when the Change is controlled.”

Suna felt a chill.

Max raised his voice.

“Controlled by who?”

The Collector leader smiled.

“The people who created you.”

More figures entered behind him.

Megan looked around the laboratory.

For the first time since the war began, she looked genuinely afraid.

Suna grabbed Max’s hand.

“We need to go.”

Max nodded.

Megan turned toward the entrance.

“Together?”

Suna looked at her.

“Together.”

The three prepared to face the Collectors.

Then the lights went out.

A massive voice echoed through the facility.

“BEGIN STAGE TWO.”

And somewhere deep beneath the mountain…

Something began to wake up.

TO BE CONTINUED…

RODENTZ — Book Two: The Nanowar

Chapter 21 — Beneath Hawthorne

The floor beneath Hawthorne Academy had always been locked.

Max had wondered why.

Now he knew.

Suna stood beside him in the darkness as a circular metal door slowly opened beneath the old science wing.

Beyond it was a staircase.

Neither of them spoke.

They descended.

At the bottom they discovered a massive underground laboratory filled with dormant machines, glass chambers, computer terminals, and hundreds of silver containers.

A symbol was stamped across the walls:

PROJECT NEXUS.

Suna’s quills rose.

“What is this?”

Max approached one of the containers.

Inside was a black metallic substance that moved like liquid.

A screen flickered on.

«NANOTECHNOLOGY RECOVERY SYSTEM

Designed for hybrid adaptation and defensive augmentation.»

Max stared.

“The Elders weren’t just hiding.”

“They were preparing,” Suna whispered.

Suddenly, something moved inside the chamber.

The nanites awakened.

Chapter 22 — The First Bond

Max reached toward the containment chamber.

The silver substance suddenly flowed through a microscopic crack.

It covered his hand.

“Max!”

He tried to pull away.

The nanites spread across his arm, forming a thin metallic layer.

Then they stopped.

Max waited.

Nothing happened.

He looked at his reflection in the glass.

His eyes glowed faintly.

A voice came from the computer.

«Host compatibility: 97%.»

Suna stepped closer.

“Why you?”

Max shook his head.

“I don’t know.”

Then another container opened.

The nanites flowed toward Suna.

They surrounded her without hurting her, weaving themselves between her quills and across her arms.

Her breathing quickened.

The laboratory lights flashed.

«Host compatibility: 99%.»

Max smiled.

“For once, you’re better at something than me.”

Suna laughed.

But the computer suddenly displayed another message.

«WARNING: EXTERNAL BREACH DETECTED.»

The laughter stopped.

Someone had found them.

Chapter 23 — Megan’s Army

Megan stood on the roof of an abandoned factory.

Hundreds of hybrids gathered below her.

Some had wings.

Some had claws.

Some had scales.

Some were barely recognizable as human anymore.

Megan raised her voice.

“They want us afraid!”

The crowd responded.

“They want us contained!”

The crowd grew louder.

“They want us to apologize for surviving!”

She spread her wings.

“We don’t apologize.”

The army moved toward Hawthorne.

Megan looked toward the distant school.

“Tonight, we take it back.”

But she didn’t know Max and Suna were already preparing.

And she didn’t know the humans were preparing too.

Chapter 24 — The Human Hunters

Armored vehicles surrounded Hawthorne Academy.

Human soldiers climbed out.

Their commander, Colonel Voss, looked toward the school.

“Nobody enters until we know where the nanotechnology is.”

A soldier hesitated.

“Sir, what if the students are still inside?”

Voss looked at him.

“Then they shouldn’t have been hiding hybrids.”

The soldiers raised their weapons.

The war had begun.

Chapter 25 — Silver Skin

Max discovered that the nanotechnology could respond to his thoughts.

A thin layer formed around his body.

His clothes transformed into a sleek protective suit.

His movements became faster.

His strength increased.

But the technology wasn’t perfect.

Every time Max pushed it harder, he became exhausted.

Suna’s system behaved differently.

Her nanites adapted to her quills.

When she became frightened, the quills became surrounded by tiny metallic shields.

When she concentrated, the nanites formed protective plates around her body.

Suna stared at herself.

“I don’t want to become a weapon.”

Max looked at her.

“Neither do I.”

“Then what are we?”

Max looked toward the school.

“Students protecting their home.”

Chapter 26 — The Siege

The first explosions shook Hawthorne Academy.

Windows rattled.

Students screamed.

Teachers rushed everyone into the basement.

Max and Suna stood at the front entrance.

Outside, Megan’s army approached from one direction.

Human soldiers approached from another.

Suna looked at Max.

“We’re surrounded.”

Max nodded.

“Then we don’t let either side through.”

The doors opened.

Max stepped outside.

Suna followed.

Every hybrid in the courtyard stared.

Megan landed on the roof above them.

“Max.”

“Megan.”

She looked at the metallic armor covering him.

“You found the Elders’ technology.”

Max shook his head.

“We found a way to protect ourselves.”

Megan’s expression hardened.

“You always confuse protection with weakness.”

Then she jumped.

Chapter 27 — Wings Against Steel

Megan attacked.

Max barely blocked her first strike.

The impact sent him sliding across the pavement.

Suna fired a burst of quills.

Megan twisted through the air and avoided them.

“You’re learning,” Megan said.

“So are you,” Suna answered.

Megan’s wings beat violently.

A powerful gust knocked several students backward.

Max’s nanites reacted.

The armor expanded around his body.

He planted his feet.

“Suna!”

She understood.

Suna charged.

Her metallic quills formed a protective shield.

She struck the ground.

The impact knocked Megan away.

For the first time, Megan looked uncertain.

Chapter 28 — The Choice

Max had a chance to hurt Megan.

He didn’t take it.

Instead, he offered his hand.

“Come back.”

Megan stared at him.

“You still think we can live beside humans?”

“I think we can live without becoming what they fear.”

Megan almost accepted.

Then a human missile struck the courtyard.

The three hybrids were thrown apart.

Megan looked toward the soldiers.

“They’ll never stop.”

Max stood.

“Then we’ll make them.”

Chapter 29 — The School Fights Back

The students of Hawthorne refused to hide.

They activated the school’s emergency defenses.

Barricades rose from the ground.

Old security drones awakened.

Hybrid students used their abilities to defend the entrances.

Max and Suna coordinated the defense.

For the first time, Hawthorne wasn’t simply a refuge.

It was a fortress.

But Max noticed something disturbing.

The humans weren’t attacking randomly.

They were targeting specific buildings.

“The laboratory,” he realized.

“They know about the nanites.”

Chapter 30 — The Betrayal

A student named Alex appeared beside Max.

“We have a problem.”

“What?”

Alex lowered his voice.

“Someone inside the school gave the humans our location.”

Max froze.

“Who?”

Alex pointed toward the science wing.

A figure disappeared through a doorway.

Max and Suna followed.

They found one of the teachers standing beside a communication terminal.

The teacher turned.

“I’m sorry.”

Max stared.

“Why?”

“Because humans promised they’d leave the rest of you alone.”

Suna’s expression hardened.

“They lied.”

The teacher looked down.

“I know.”

Outside, another wave of soldiers arrived.

Chapter 31 — The Nanite Core

Alex discovered a second chamber beneath the laboratory.

Inside was a giant sphere of silver material.

“The central core,” he said.

Max approached.

“What does it do?”

Alex read the screen.

“It controls every nanite system.”

Suna stared.

“Then Megan could take it.”

Max shook his head.

“So could the humans.”

Alex looked at him.

“There’s another problem.”

The core was beginning to overload.

If it exploded, Hawthorne would be destroyed.

Chapter 32 — Megan’s Secret

Megan returned alone.

She walked into the laboratory.

Max immediately raised his arm.

“Don’t.”

Megan looked at him.

“I came to warn you.”

“About what?”

“The humans aren’t here for the school.”

She pointed toward the core.

“They want to replicate the nanites.”

Max understood.

“If they succeed…”

“They can build an army.”

Suna stepped forward.

“Then we have the same enemy.”

Megan looked at her.

“For tonight.”

Chapter 33 — Three Leaders

Max, Suna, and Megan stood around the core.

Three hybrids who had spent months fighting one another.

Now they had one enemy.

Max looked at Megan.

“No killing.”

Megan frowned.

“You’re giving me rules?”

“I’m giving you a choice.”

She looked at Suna.

Suna nodded.

Megan finally lowered her wings.

“Fine.”

They joined forces.

Chapter 34 — The Counterattack

Hawthorne’s defenders launched a coordinated counterattack.

Max led the students through the western corridor.

Suna protected the laboratory.

Megan took the rooftops.

The humans were forced backward.

But Colonel Voss had anticipated the move.

He activated a device.

Every nanite-powered hybrid suddenly froze.

Max dropped to one knee.

Suna gasped.

Megan fell from the roof.

Voss smiled.

“Technology always has a weakness.”

Chapter 35 — The Signal

Alex discovered the weakness.

“The nanites are receiving a control signal.”

Max struggled to stand.

“Can you shut it down?”

“Not from here.”

Suna looked at the core.

“Then we’ll go there.”

Megan shook her head.

“The core?”

Suna nodded.

“If we connect ourselves directly to it, we can override the signal.”

Max understood the danger.

“We might lose the nanites.”

Suna smiled.

“Better that than letting them control us.”

Chapter 36 — The Three-Way Link

Max, Suna, and Megan connected themselves to the core.

Silver light filled the chamber.

For a moment, all three experienced the same vision.

Thousands of hybrids.

Millions.

An entire world transformed.

Then they saw something worse.

Human laboratories filled with artificial hybrids.

The nanotechnology wasn’t merely defensive.

It could accelerate hybrid evolution.

Megan whispered:

“They’ve been planning this.”

Max answered:

“Then we stop them here.”

Chapter 37 — Voss

Colonel Voss entered the chamber.

“You don’t understand what you’re standing on.”

Max stepped forward.

“We understand enough.”

Voss activated his control device.

Nothing happened.

Suna smiled.

“We changed the signal.”

Voss looked shocked.

Megan’s wings opened.

“You lost.”

Voss slowly lowered his weapon.

“Do you really think humans will accept you?”

Max answered:

“Maybe not.”

He looked toward the students.

“But we’re going to give them a reason to try.”

Chapter 38 — The Collapse

The laboratory began shaking.

The core was destabilizing.

Alex shouted from the doorway.

“Everyone out!”

Max looked at the core.

“We can’t leave it.”

Suna understood.

“If the humans get it…”

Megan finished the sentence.

“Nobody gets it.”

Together they redirected the nanite energy into the containment system.

The core began shutting down.

The laboratory collapsed around them.

Max grabbed Suna’s hand.

Megan grabbed Max.

The three escaped seconds before the chamber disappeared.

Chapter 39 — After the Battle

Morning came quietly.

Hawthorne Academy was damaged.

The human soldiers had retreated.

Megan’s army had scattered.

The nanotechnology was gone.

Or so everyone thought.

Max looked at his hands.

The armor was still there.

Suna’s metallic quills shimmered.

Megan’s wings carried faint silver patterns.

Alex stared at them.

“The nanites didn’t disappear.”

Max looked toward the horizon.

“They chose us.”

Suna corrected him.

“No.”

She smiled.

“We chose them.”

Chapter 40 — The New Hawthorne

Weeks later, Hawthorne Academy reopened.

Humans still feared hybrids.

Some hybrids still distrusted humans.

Megan no longer commanded an army.

Instead, she helped train students to defend themselves.

Max became one of Hawthorne’s student leaders.

Suna became the academy’s first nanite researcher.

And the three of them agreed on one rule:

The technology would never be used to conquer anyone.

But far away, beneath an abandoned military facility, a computer screen flickered.

A human scientist watched footage of Max, Suna, and Megan.

On the screen appeared three words:

«NANITE HOSTS CONFIRMED.»

The scientist smiled.

“Begin Phase Two.”

And somewhere beneath the earth, something enormous opened its eyes.

RODENTZ

Book Two: THE FINAL WAR

FINAL ACT

CHAPTER 41 — THE STADIUM

Three months had passed since Hawthorne Academy had been attacked.

For the first time, the city seemed almost normal.

Almost.

A massive concert was being held at Jefferson Stadium.

Thirty thousand people packed the seats.

Music thundered through the building.

Thousands of lights moved through the darkness.

On the enormous stage, the band played beneath a wall of speakers.

Nobody noticed the helicopters circling above.

Nobody noticed the armored vehicles arriving beneath the stadium.

Nobody noticed the soldiers taking positions around every entrance.

And nobody noticed the figure sitting alone in the highest section.

Megan.

She wore a black jacket over her nanotech armor.

Her wings were folded behind her.

Her replacement arm rested against the railing.

She stared at the crowd.

For months, she had tried to decide what she wanted.

Revenge.

Freedom.

Justice.

Maybe all three.

Then she heard a voice behind her.

“Beautiful view.”

Megan turned.

Max stood several rows away.

His nanotech armor shimmered beneath his jacket.

Megan sighed.

“I knew you’d come.”

Max looked toward the stage.

“I knew you would too.”

CHAPTER 42 — OLD ENEMIES

The concert continued below them.

Neither Max nor Megan moved.

“We could walk away,” Max said.

Megan laughed.

“You don’t believe that.”

“No.”

“Neither do I.”

Megan stood.

Her mechanical arm began shifting.

Silver plates moved across her forearm.

A blade formed.

Max’s armor activated.

The crowd below continued cheering.

They had no idea two of Hawthorne’s most powerful students were standing above them.

Megan raised her blade.

“You always wanted to save everyone.”

Max looked at her.

“And you always wanted to punish everyone.”

“I wanted them to be afraid of us.”

“Why?”

“Because I was afraid of them.”

Max was silent.

Megan lowered the blade.

“That’s what you never understood.”

CHAPTER 43 — THE HUMAN ARMY

The stadium lights suddenly went out.

The music stopped.

Thirty thousand people gasped.

Then the giant screens came alive.

Colonel Voss appeared.

“You have been lied to.”

The audience watched in confusion.

“Hybrids are not the future.”

Behind Voss stood hundreds of armored soldiers.

“They are the beginning of the end.”

The stadium doors slammed shut.

Panic spread through the crowd.

Megan looked at Max.

“They followed us.”

Max nodded.

“They followed the nanites.”

Voss continued.

“And tonight, the world will finally see what happens when humanity takes back control.”

The soldiers entered the stadium.

Their armor activated.

Megan smiled bitterly.

“Looks like our fight isn’t over.”

Max looked toward the terrified audience.

“No.”

He stepped toward the railing.

“Now it’s bigger.”

CHAPTER 44 — THE STAGE

Max jumped.

His nanotech armor expanded around him.

He landed on the stage.

The crowd screamed.

The soldiers raised their weapons.

Max raised his hands.

“Nobody here is your enemy.”

One soldier fired.

Max’s armor absorbed the impact.

The crowd scattered.

Megan descended from the upper seats.

Her wings opened.

She landed beside Max.

The audience stared.

For a moment, the two enemies stood together.

Then Megan looked at him.

“Temporary alliance?”

Max smiled.

“Temporary.”

They charged.

CHAPTER 45 — THE CONCERT BECOMES A BATTLEFIELD

The stadium became chaos.

Hybrid students who had secretly attended the concert began helping people escape.

Suna appeared near the eastern entrance.

She had spent months developing her own nanotech abilities.

Her quills shimmered with silver light.

“Everybody toward the exits!”

A young hybrid froze.

“What about Max?”

Suna looked toward the stage.

“I know him.”

She turned toward the battle.

“He’ll need me.”

CHAPTER 46 — MEGAN’S WINGS

Megan launched herself into the air.

Her armor spread across her wings.

Silver patterns illuminated them.

She flew above the stadium.

Below her, soldiers moved into formation.

Megan folded her wings.

She dropped.

At the last moment, she opened them.

A powerful shockwave knocked the soldiers backward.

She landed on the stage.

Max looked at her.

“That was impressive.”

“Don’t sound surprised.”

“I wasn’t.”

“You were.”

Max laughed.

For one second, they were teenagers again.

Then Voss appeared on the stadium screen.

“You think this changes anything?”

Megan looked up.

“You really don’t know us.”

CHAPTER 47 — SUNA

Suna entered the stadium control room.

Alex was already there.

“The military has locked the exits,” he said.

Suna looked at the controls.

“Can you open them?”

“Not all of them.”

“Then open what you can.”

Alex hesitated.

“What about Max and Megan?”

Suna looked through the window.

“They’re going to fight.”

“Against each other?”

Suna shook her head.

“Eventually.”

CHAPTER 48 — THE FINAL ARGUMENT

Max and Megan found themselves alone backstage.

The concert equipment hummed around them.

Megan’s blade appeared again.

Max’s armor formed around his fists.

“You still think I’m wrong,” Megan said.

“Yes.”

“You still think humans can accept us.”

“I think some can.”

“And the ones who can’t?”

“We stop them.”

Megan shook her head.

“You don’t understand.”

“I understand enough.”

She raised the blade.

Max prepared himself.

Megan attacked.

Their armor collided.

The fight moved through the backstage corridors and onto the stage.

Thousands watched.

The band had fled.

The stadium screens showed everything.

Max blocked.

Megan struck.

Max pushed her back.

Neither wanted to truly hurt the other.

But neither was willing to surrender.

CHAPTER 49 — THE BLADE

Megan’s blade extended.

Max caught her wrist.

“Stop!”

“You stop!”

“I don’t want to fight you!”

“Then why are you?”

“Because you’re going to destroy everything!”

Megan’s expression changed.

“You think I don’t know that?”

She looked at the crowd.

Families.

Students.

Humans.

Hybrids.

Everyone trapped together.

Megan slowly lowered her weapon.

“I wanted them to fear us.”

She looked at Max.

“But I never wanted this.”

Max released her.

Then Voss spoke.

“Excellent.”

They both looked up.

Voss smiled from the screen.

“Now I know exactly how to control you.”

CHAPTER 50 — THE TRAP

The stadium floor opened.

A massive machine rose beneath the stage.

Nanotechnology flooded through the arena.

Every hybrid froze.

Max dropped to his knees.

Megan’s wings collapsed.

Suna screamed from the control room.

“MAX!”

The machine began extracting nanite energy.

Voss appeared on the screen.

“The technology belongs to humanity.”

Max struggled to stand.

“No.”

Voss smiled.

“Then watch what happens.”

The machine activated.

CHAPTER 51 — THE CHOICE

Megan looked at Max.

“We can’t beat it separately.”

Max nodded.

“So we don’t.”

They connected their armor systems.

Silver energy moved between them.

Megan’s wings illuminated.

Max’s armor transformed.

The machine began malfunctioning.

Voss shouted.

“What are you doing?”

Megan smiled.

“Something you never understood.”

Max finished:

“We don’t need to be the same.”

Their systems synchronized.

The machine overloaded.

The stadium lights exploded into darkness.

CHAPTER 52 — SUNA’S PLAN

Suna reached the main computer.

She placed her hands against it.

Her nanites connected.

Suddenly she understood the entire system.

“It’s not a weapon.”

Alex stared.

“What?”

“It’s a network.”

Suna realized what Voss had done.

“He isn’t controlling the nanites.”

She looked toward the stadium.

“He’s controlling the fear.”

Suna changed the system.

Instead of shutting the nanites down, she broadcast their signal.

Every screen in the stadium changed.

Images appeared.

Hybrid children.

Hybrid families.

Students at Hawthorne.

Humans helping hybrids.

People laughing together.

The audience became silent.

For the first time, the world saw hybrids as people.

CHAPTER 53 — THE WORLD WATCHES

The broadcast spread beyond the stadium.

Phones recorded it.

News stations picked it up.

Millions watched.

Voss stared at the screens.

“No.”

Suna’s voice came through the speakers.

“You wanted everyone to see us.”

She looked directly into the nearest camera.

“So look.”

A hybrid child appeared beside her.

Then a human student.

They stood together.

Suna continued.

“We’re not your monsters.”

The stadium erupted in applause.

CHAPTER 54 — MAX VS. MEGAN

The battle was almost over.

But Max and Megan still stood across from one another.

Megan looked at him.

“You know this doesn’t solve everything.”

“I know.”

“Humans will still hate us.”

“Some will.”

“Some hybrids will hate them.”

“Probably.”

Megan smiled.

“So what happens now?”

Max looked toward the crowd.

“We keep choosing.”

“Choosing what?”

“Who we’re going to be.”

Megan’s blade disappeared.

Max’s armor faded.

Then Megan offered him her mechanical hand.

Max took it.

CHAPTER 55 — THE LAST ATTACK

Voss refused to surrender.

His personal armor activated.

He entered the stadium.

Unlike the soldiers, his armor was enormous.

It had been designed from everything the humans had learned from Max, Suna, and Megan.

Voss attacked.

Max was thrown across the stage.

Megan flew toward him.

Voss struck her from the air.

Suna arrived.

Her quills became surrounded by nanotech shields.

The three hybrids stood together.

Voss laughed.

“Three against one?”

Max looked at Megan.

Then Suna.

“No.”

He smiled.

“Thirty thousand against one.”

The crowd began chanting.

“HAW-THORNE!”

CHAPTER 56 — EVERYONE

The hybrids in the audience stood.

Some activated their abilities.

Others simply stepped forward.

Human students stood beside them.

The soldiers hesitated.

One by one, they lowered their weapons.

Voss looked around.

“You would betray humanity?”

A soldier shook his head.

“No.”

He removed his helmet.

“We’re protecting people.”

Voss turned.

Max, Suna, and Megan stood behind him.

Together.

Voss’s armor powered down.

The battle was over.

CHAPTER 57 — MORNING

Sunlight entered the stadium.

Emergency crews arrived.

The crowd slowly left.

News helicopters circled overhead.

Max sat on the edge of the stage.

Suna sat beside him.

Megan stood nearby.

Her blade was gone.

Her mechanical arm remained.

She looked at it.

“I thought this thing would make me a monster.”

Suna smiled.

“It didn’t.”

Megan looked at Max.

“Neither did you.”

Max laughed.

“Thanks.”

“I wasn’t complimenting you.”

“I know.”

CHAPTER 58 — HAWTHORNE

Weeks later, Hawthorne Academy reopened.

But it wasn’t hidden anymore.

Humans came to visit.

Scientists came to study the nanotechnology.

Families came looking for answers.

Some were afraid.

Some were angry.

But many simply wanted to understand.

The academy became something new.

Not a fortress.

Not a prison.

A school.

Max stood before the students.

“We’ve spent too long fighting over what we are.”

He looked at Suna.

“Now we figure out what we can become.”

The students applauded.

Megan stood at the back.

For once, she wasn’t leading an army.

She was simply listening.

CHAPTER 59 — MEGAN

Megan found Max outside that evening.

“You really think this is going to work?”

“No.”

Megan raised an eyebrow.

“That’s encouraging.”

Max smiled.

“I think it’ll be difficult.”

She looked toward the academy.

“So do I.”

She flexed her mechanical hand.

The nanotech shimmered.

“You know, I still like the blade.”

Max laughed.

“I figured.”

“But I’m learning when not to use it.”

Max nodded.

“That’s probably the most important power you’ve got.”

Megan smiled.

“Don’t get sentimental.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

CHAPTER 60 — THE FUTURE

Months later, the three friends stood on the roof of Hawthorne Academy.

Max.

Suna.

Megan.

The city stretched before them.

Humans and hybrids walked the streets below.

It wasn’t perfect.

It wasn’t peaceful.

Not yet.

But it was possible.

Suna looked toward the horizon.

“Do you think the Change was meant to happen?”

Max shook his head.

“I don’t know.”

Megan looked at her silver arm.

“Maybe it doesn’t matter.”

Suna turned toward her.

“What do you mean?”

Megan smiled.

“Maybe what matters is what we do after it.”

A distant siren echoed through the city.

Max looked toward the skyline.

“Something tells me we’re not done.”

Megan’s wings opened.

Suna’s quills shimmered.

Max’s armor activated.

The three looked at one another.

Then they laughed.

Below them, Hawthorne Academy came alive.

The future was uncertain.

But for the first time, nobody was running from it.

And somewhere beyond the city, deep beneath a forgotten laboratory, a single silver nanite flickered to life.

A tiny screen activated.

«PROJECT NEXUS: EVOLUTION COMPLETE.»

Then another message appeared.

«NEW HOST DETECTED.»

The screen went black.

THE END.